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Source: *Modern Asian Studies*, Jul., 2008, Vol. 42, No. 4 (Jul., 2008), pp. 733-750

Published by: Cambridge University Press

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/20488039

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Modern Asian Studies **42,** 4 (2008) pp. 733–750. © 2007 Cambridge University Press
doi:10.1017/S0026749X06002708 First published online 3 May 2007

'A Picturesque but Hopeless Resistance':[1] *Rehe in 1933*

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Abstract

The Japanese invasion of Rehe in 1933 proved to be a walkover, despite the intense rhetoric of resistance which had characterised statements by leaders in north China in early 1933. This article looks at the local context of the governorship of Tang Yulin, at the role of Zhang Xueliang and regional leaders, and at the central government's involvement, principally through Song Ziwen (T.V. Soong), in order to understand China's failure in Rehe. This failure strongly influenced the subsequent Tanggu truce and affected the careers of Song and Zhang in the short term, but did not deter Jiang Jieshi from continuing his anti-communist encirclement campaigns.

The development of modern Chinese nationalism[2] can be viewed as a process occurring over more than a century, but the 1920s and 1930s provided an opportunity to strengthen both the language and the performance associated with successful national arousal. The Guomindang, the Chinese Nationalist Party, espoused the cause of nationalism as part of its drive to power, so that the activities of Japan in northeastern China proved a critical test for the party's commitment to national defence. The decision for non-resistance in the face of Japan's attack in September 1931 was justified by Jiang Jieshi, the Chinese president and the leader of the Guomindang, in the expectation of foreign intervention to restrain Japan, but by 1933

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[1] *North China Herald* (hereafter *NCH*), 1/3/33, p. 321. All names in *NCH* quotes have been converted into *pinyin*.

[2] On nationalism in China see, for example, Jonathan Unger (ed.), *Chinese Nationalism* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1996); C. X. George Wei and Xiaoyuan Liu (eds), *Chinese Nationalism in Perspective: Historical and Recent Cases* (Westport: Greenwood, 2001).

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this hope for intervention had been severely dented. Therefore the limited invasion of North China and the subsequent invasion of Rehe[3] in 1933 proved a severe test for the Guomindang. Sources for this study include the Chinese periodical press, in particular the *Guowen Zhoubao* [National News Weekly], then published weekly in Tianjin, biographies of key Chinese figures and the reports of various foreign observers. These sources provide a clear outline of the background and development of the crisis in Rehe. Earlier scholarly writing about 1933 has focused most heavily upon the humiliating Tanggu truce of May, without a full understanding of the impact of the prior Rehe events. Nanjing offered an appeasing resolution of the North China situation, because it had learnt that the military leaders in North China would not offer vigorous resistance to Japan, regardless of the rhetoric of nationalism, which they had appeared to embrace wholeheartedly.[4]

In early 1933 as part of Japan's consolidation of its puppet state of Manzhouguo[5], the Japanese military advanced into the Chinese province of Rehe, which had been newly created in 1928. Japan had been claiming since 1932 that this area was an integral part of Manzhouguo. The Japanese military action had been foreseen for many months and in February 1933 strenuous efforts had been made by Chinese leaders to prepare for a vigorous resistance against Japan in the area. Yet when the Japanese moved, the commitment to resistance proved to be largely illusory and the area fell rapidly under Japanese control, with considerable repercussions upon China, especially in the north. This article explores the background to China's failure in Rehe and considers what this case reveals about the problems of developing effective national strength in the earlier 1930s.

Geographically Rehe referred to an originally Mongol-inhabited area to the north of Beijing, which had been singled out for attention by the great monarchs of the Qing dynasty. The Kangxi Emperor had begun the annual treks to the area in the 1680s, but regular annual visits by a ruling emperor ceased in 1820. To Kangxi, Rehe

[3] Rehe, literally 'hot river', was then known in Western atlases as Jehol.

[4] Despite its title, the recent book by Marjorie Dryburgh, *North China and Japanese Expansion 1933–1937: Regional Power and the National Interest* (Richmond: Curzon, 2000), barely touches on 1933 and 1934.

[5] The state that Japan created in north-east China in 1932 was then known in the West as Manchukuo and in Japan as Manshūkoku. Its Japanese garrison, the Kantōgun, was originally created by Japan in 1905 to protect the Japanese-leased territory in Guandong, then known as Kwantung, and the South Manchurian Railway Zone.

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provided the opportunity to escape the heat of the Beijing summer, as well as a chance to hunt.[6] The Qianlong Emperor in the eighteenth century had adorned Chengde, the principal town in the area, with palaces and temples, including a version of Lhasa's Potala. The area was formally part of Zhili province.[7] In 1928 the new Nationalist government in Nanjing decided to reorganise the Inner Mongolian frontier into a set of formal provinces, rather than keeping it under special administrative districts within other northern provinces. Rehe, Chahaer, Suiyuan and Ningxia emerged from this decision, which Lattimore argued was the result of increased *han* Chinese migration into the area, a migration which gradually transformed the local population mix in favour of the Chinese majority.[8] In the case of Rehe, this change to a province also attached the immediate superior authority over the area to the leaders of the northeast, in recognition that they, rather than Beijing, controlled the leading militarist in the area, Tang Yulin.[9]

The career of Tang Yulin provides a partial insight into the problems facing China's resistance in 1933, since even within the arena of warlordism in China, Tang was more overtly self-serving than most. Described by the writer and journalist Lin Yutang as a 'model bandit',[10] Tang had been born in 1871 to a poor peasant family in the northeast.[11] Early on in life he had become a bandit and in 1900 he linked up with Zhang Zuolin, the military leader who was eventually to wield the greatest power in the Northeast. In 1902 Tang was incorporated into a legitimate unit of the Qing army. Zhang

[6] Pamela Crossley & Evelyn Rawski, 'A profile of the Manchu language in Ch'ing history', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 53, 1 (1993), p.95n suggests 1821 as the last year, but 1820, when the Jiaqing Emperor died in Rehe, seems more accurate, for the Daoguang Emperor no longer went there. See Arthur Hummel (ed.), *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1943–4), vol.1, p. 574.

[7] Sven Hedin, trans. E.G.Nash, *Jehol: City of Emperors* (London: Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1932), pp. 17–22, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th Edn (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1974), vol.3, p.167.

[8] Owen Lattimore, *Manchuria, Cradle of Conflict* (New York: Macmillan, 1932), pp. 276, 282.

[9] Howard L.Boorman (ed.), *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967–71), vol.1, p. 63.

[10] Edgar Snow, *Far Eastern Front* (London: Jarrolds, 1934), p. 242.

[11] *Who's Who in China: Supplement* (Shanghai, 1933, reprinted Hong Kong: Chinese Materials Center, 1982), p.100 gives his birthplace as Chaoyang in Rehe, while other sources suggest Liaoning. Snow, *Far Eastern Front*, p.243; *Dongbei renwu da cidian* [Large dictionary of personalities of the Northeast] (Shenyang: Liaoning Renmin Chubanshe, 1992), p. 734.

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later arranged for Tang to go into the Mukden Military Training Institute[12] and thereafter Zhang employed Tang in his army. Despite some conflicts with Zhang in the late 1910s, Tang was promoted to Lt-General in 1919 and became commander of the 11th Division of the Fengtian Army in 1921, stationed in southeast Liaoning province. His chance for greater duties came after the November 1925 mutiny of Guo Songling against Zhang Zuolin. During this, Tang's unit blocked Guo's advance at Yixian on the banks of the Daling River and after being defeated there, Tang participated in the army led by Zuolin's son, Zhang Xueliang. With the collapse of Guo's mutiny, Zhang Zuolin recognised Tang as loyal and in April 1926 appointed him as Controller of Rehe (Rehe *dutong*).[13]

Following the assassination of Zhang Zuolin in June 1928 and the December 1928 rapprochement between Zhang Xueliang and the Nationalist Government at Nanjing, Tang remained an important member of Zhang Xueliang's group, serving as a member of the Northeast political affairs committee and as provincial chairman of Rehe. His military posts were as 36th Division commander and as the deputy commander in Rehe of the North East Border Defence Army.[14] His appointment as Chairman of the Rehe Provincial government was confirmed by the Nanjing government in 1929.[15]

Once in control of Rehe, Tang was a ruthless exploiter of the region, both to increase the size of his own military unit and to raise his own wealth. He became known as Tang '*Bapi*' (strip off the skin), for his ability in tax extraction, with levels of abuse rarely seen in the areas of other militarists in the northeast. His main focus was upon opium, which peasants were ordered to plant. Some estimates put the rates of addiction by the end of his rule at more than 50 percent. Opium was shipped out under military escort along Manchurian railways, in a deal originally cut with Zhang Zuolin, while some of it was processed locally into morphine at a factory opened with the help of Japanese technicians. In addition Tang enriched himself through the sale of national antiquities, drawn from the palaces and temples which had been built in Chengde under the Qianlong Emperor. After

[12] Snow, *Far Eastern Front*, 243; *Dongbei renwu*, p.734. Mukden, the principal inland city of southern Manchuria, is now known as Shenyang.

[13] Shen Xiting (ed.), *Dongbei Ya yanjiu: Dongbei jindaishi yanjiu* [Research on Northeast Asia: research on the modern history of the Northeast] (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou Guji Chubanshe, 1994), pp. 136–7.

[14] Shen, *Dongbei Ya yanjiu*, p. 137.

[15] Snow, *Far Eastern Front*, p. 243; Boorman, *Biographical*, vol. 3, p. 358.

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his jurisdiction was extended in the spring of 1929 to include the Longhua area, he also began to plunder graves associated with the Mongol aristocracy. Tang used his wealth to buy palatial residences in Mukden, Beiping and Tianjin, besides living in the Qing Crown Prince's apartments in Chengde. He also filled the upper levels of the provincial bureaucracy with family members and in-laws. In response to his style of administration, some peasants fled the province, while there were several anti-tax struggles in rural areas.[16]

Japanese actions in 1931 transformed Rehe from a relative backwater of little concern to most Chinese into a frontline province in the context of deteriorating Sino-Japanese relations. In the late evening of 18 September 1931 middle-ranking officers of the Japanese Kantō Army initiated operations in the South Manchurian Railway Zone near Mukden, whilst claiming to be reacting in self-defence against a bomb attack on the railway by Chinese soldiers. Overnight the Japanese secured Mukden and proceeded rapidly to extend Japanese authority in towns throughout the Railway Zone. China's response, dictated from the centre by President Jiang Jieshi, was one of non-resistance and avoidance of provocation of the Japanese, with the intention of using the League of Nations to turn back Japan's aggression.[17] Regrettably from China's viewpoint, the League proved unable to offer a firm and instant condemnation of Japan and this allowed the Japanese to consolidate their position in the Chinese North East without international sanctions.

Following the events of September, there was no immediate Japanese invasion of Rehe, but several Japanese representatives visited Tang trying to encourage him to join with Japan, in order to preserve his territory,[18] but without immediate results. When the Japanese began the formal creation of Manzhouguo in February 1932 with its capital at Changchun (soon to be known as Xinjing, new capital), Rehe was designated as part of the area involved. On 17 February a Northeast Executive Committee (*Dongbei xingzheng weiyuanhui*) was set up, which included the name of Tang Yulin among its members, with the offer of the governorship of Rehe and a position as a

[16] Shen, *Dongbei Ya yanjiu*, p. 137; Snow, *Far Eastern Front,* pp. 243–4; Hedin, *Jehol,* p.16.

[17] See, for example, Sadako Ogata, *Defiance in Manchuria: The Making of Japanese Foreign Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964) and Parks Coble, *Facing Japan: Chinese Politics and Japanese Imperialism, 1931–1937* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard, 1991).

[18] Shen, *Dongbei Ya yanjiu,* p. 137.

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Councilor (*canyiguan*).[19] It seems that Tang had sent some delegates to Changchun, but had made no commitments in writing. Meanwhile he had kept good links with Zhang Xueliang, so as to ensure a route out for Rehe's opium, and in the end he rejected the offers from Manzhouguo.[20]

Although the Japanese did not move vigorously against Rehe, they did put pressure on its borders by bombing Chaoyang on 17 July 1932 and then by attacking Nanling in the east of the province on 21 August 1932 with an armoured train.[21] In addition the Kantō Army Special Affairs section tried to persuade Tang to break with Zhang Xueliang, until finally in mid-November 1932 Tang sent Zhang Shunqing as his representative to meet the Japanese at Beipiao in eastern Rehe. The Japanese Army made three demands of Tang:

a) If Tang was to be appointed as the Manzhouguo governor of Rehe and army commander for the area, he must send a person with personal letters of responsibility to reside at Changchun as liaison.
b) Tang must agree to the extension of the railway from Beipiao to Chengde.
c) Tang must agree to permit the Japanese Army to set up a wireless station in Chengde.

Tang's representative telegraphed the demands to Tang and to Zhang Xueliang, who urged rejecting them, and subsequently Tang refused to accept these demands.[22] Thus at this point there was an appearance of strong solidarity between Tang as the local Chinese commander and Zhang Xueliang as the senior military leader in north China, with both clearly committed to resisting Japan, yet little had been done to provide Tang with material and effective support against a possible Japanese invasion, even from within north China, let alone from national resources.

Meanwhile, the world situation and the local situation in Manzhouguo were both pushing Japan towards action over Rehe.

[19] *Wei Manzhouguo dashiji* [Chronicle of events in puppet Manzhouguo] (Dalian: Dalian Chubanshe, 1990), p.11; Li Hongwen & Zhang Benzheng (eds), *Dongbei dashiji* [Chronicle of events in the Northeast] (Changchun: Jilin Wenshi Chubanshe, 1987), vol.2, p. 750. Manzhouguo was officially inaugurated on 1 March 1932.

[20] Snow, *Far Eastern Front,* pp. 243–4.

[21] Li & Zhang, *Dongbei dashiji,* vol. 2, p. 769.

[22] Sun Bangzhu (ed.), *Jiu yi ba shibian* [The September 18 incident] (Changchun: Jilin Renmin Chubanshe, 1993), pp.753–4, quoting Wang Ruilin, *Beipiao lunxian de jingguo* [The process of the occupation of Beipiao].

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Internationally the Lytton Commission, which had been appointed by the League of Nations to investigate the Manchurian situation, had written up its report, even though full discussion and acceptance of the report by the League would take six months. The report, whilst acknowledging some Chinese faults, was clearly hostile to Japan, and Japanese leaders perceived the need to consolidate in Manzhouguo in the face of international isolation. In Manzhouguo itself, there began an upswing in anti-Japanese activity in the latter part of 1932 after the 15 September 1932 signature of the Japan-Manzhouguo Protocol. On 27 September Su Bingwen, the head of the guards on the western end of the Chinese Eastern Railway,[23] revolted, seized the railway and held several Japanese hostages in Manzhouli. This was followed by increased activity by regular forces under Ma Zhanshan and Fang Zhenwu and by volunteer forces linked to Zhu Qinglan, who was based in Beiping. The Japanese response was swift and vigorous, involving both direct suppression by the Japanese army and the building up of the Manzhouguo army. By December most of the volunteers had been routed, with many fleeing into Rehe, while others such as Ma Zhanshan and Su Bingwen were forced to take refuge across the border of the Soviet Union.[24]

Such a level of anti-Japanese activity was bound to provoke Japanese concern about the frontier area of Manzhoukuo. Indeed reports reached Nanjing on 28 December 1932 concerning skirmishes near the temple in Chaoyang two days before, which had prompted Zhang Xueliang and Tang Yulin to announce 'Resistance to the death against Japanese encroachment' on 28 December. Japanese intelligence reported that Zhang had sent three brigades into Rehe, while the Tokyo's *Asahi Shimbun* of 31 December noted a Japanese War Office statement saying, 'If Marshal Zhang Xueliang continues his present activities in Rehe and his attempts to create disturbances elsewhere in Manchuria, the Japanese Army will be compelled to resort to positive measures to settle the Rehe question.'[25]

Nevertheless the full attack did not initially come against Rehe, but against North China. There had been brief clashes near Shanhaiguan on 1 October and 8 December 1932, but the full attack came on New Year's Day 1933, with the Chinese pushed back after three days of

[23] This railway was controlled by the USSR, as heir to the concession granted by the Sino-Russian treaty of 1896.

[24] Snow, *Far Eastern Front,* pp. 238–40.

[25] *NCH*, 4/1/33, p. 6.

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bitter fighting.[26] The logic of an attack at Shanhaiguan was quite clear, for the immediate threat to Japanese activities in the northeast could be mounted most effectively from here, using the Beiping—Mukden railway, but the Japanese could not claim that action south of the Great Wall involved territory integral to Manzhouguo. Hence this was an action to consolidate the security of Manzhouguo, but not to expand its territory.

Despite the fighting at Shanhaiguan, there remained a perception that an attack on Rehe was still a major target for Japan and the Chinese press was ready to provide extensive details forewarning of a full-scale attack. As early as 28 December 1932, the Tianjin *Dagongbao* editorialised that one could tell that an invasion of Rehe was imminent, because the Japanese were acting as they had before the capture of Jinzhou in early 1932, by claiming Chinese war preparations and talking at the League of Nations about bandits.[27] The *Guowen Zhoubao* reported on 16 January 1933 that Japan was preparing a full invasion of Rehe,[28] while its 13 February issue listed the invasion plan, naming the three routes to be used and giving some indications of which Japanese units might be involved. The same issue noted that in early February the Japanese had halted passenger trains on the Mukden—Shanhaiguan line for three days,[29] presumably to allow the delivery of military supplies. In the Japanese Diet, meanwhile, Army Minister Araki had stated on 2 February that the Kantō Army had already agreed to cooperate with the Manzhouguo Army to eliminate the 90,000 men of the Rehe Army.[30]

Chinese response to this Japanese threat was forceful. After the Shanhaiguan attack, China had protested to the League of Nations, while Zhang Xueliang, the leading military figure in Beiping, met with Jiang Jieshi on 23 January 1933 to demand support for the defence of Rehe. Zhang publicly declared, 'If I do not save the nation and resist Japan, then call on the elders and local people of the North East to dig up my ancestral tombs.' He also urged Jiang to come north to

[26] Coble, *Facing Japan,* 91; He Zhuguo, *Shanhaiguan zhi zhan ji Rehe lunxian qianhou*, pp. 101–3, in Sun Bang (ed.), *Wei Man Junshi* [Military affairs in puppet Manzhouguo] (Changchun: Jilin Renmin Chubanshe, 1993).

[27] *Tianjin Dagongbao* of 28/12/32, quoted in *Guowen Zhoubao* (hereafter *GWZB*) 10.2 (9/1/33) *Lunping xuanji* [Selection of editorials] p. 2.

[28] *GWZB* 10.3 (16/1/33) *Dashi shuping* [Review of events], p. 1.

[29] *GWZB* 10.6 (13/2/33) *Dashi shuping,* p. 1.

[30] *GWZB* 10.6 (13.2.33) *Dashi shuping,* p. 2.

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lead the troops,[31] but Jiang sent Yang Jie to the Northern Front to represent the Central Government. Yang Jie was at that time the president of the Chinese Army Staff College and had considerable military experience in north China. Jiang refused, however, to suspend the anti-Communist campaign in the centre-south of the country.[32] Zhang Xueliang met with foreign journalists on 3 February and stated that his army was in a defensive position, and that there would be resistance if Japan attacked. Tang Yulin was in charge, except in so far as Jiang Jieshi might send down any general orders from the Military Affairs Council. In speaking at the weekly Monday morning commemorative meeting with his officers on 6 February, Zhang said, 'Rehe holds a very important place in our country's history. Rehe is the most important key to North China.' For the latter opinion he cited the invasions at the end of the Song and Ming dynasties.[33]

Central commitment to the north was reinforced when Song Ziwen,[34] the finance minister and acting head of the Executive Yuan, arrived in Beiping and held discussions with Zhang Xueliang about finance and defence. Song's position within the government had been considerably enhanced when he took over the Executive Yuan role from Wang Jingwei, who had taken leave in October 1932 for what became a six month trip to Europe, thus rendering him absent from the Rehe events. Song's presence in the senior civil government post also indicated a more strongly anti-Japanese line than Wang's, since Song had been seen to publicly support the Nineteenth Route Army's resistance to Japan at Shanghai in early 1932 and to resign in protest over the May 1932 Shanghai truce. Song was also on record for attacking Jiang's anti-communist encirclements at a time of Japanese aggression.[35]

When Song met the local press on the afternoon of his arrival in the north, he declared, 'Rehe's terrain is important as the gate to North China. If the Japanese army invades, I will definitely respond with the all the nation's strength.' Speaking later with foreign journalists, he

[31] Zhang Li et al. (eds), *Zhang Xueliang yanjiu* [Research on Zhang Xueliang] vol. 1, (Changchun: Jilin Wenshi Chubanshe, 2002), p. 227.

[32] Coble, *Facing Japan,* p. 92; Boorman, *Biographical,* vol. 4, pp. 3–4.

[33] *GWZB* 10.6 (13/2/33) *Dashi shuping,* p. 2.

[34] Often known as T. V. Soong.

[35] Edmund S.K. Fung, *In Search of Chinese Democracy: Civil Opposition in Nationalist China 1929–49* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 83; Boorman, *Biographical*, vol. 3, p. 373.

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said, 'If Rehe is attacked, it is the same as Nanjing being attacked.'[36] Song travelled with Zhang Xueliang, Zhu Qinglan and Huang Yanpei into Rehe on 17 February and had discussions with Tang Yulin in Chengde in the afternoon. Zhu Qinglan was responsible for volunteers expelled from Manchuria, while Huang Yanpei represented the Shanghai Civic Association, providing solidarity from an area of China that had already been attacked by the Japanese a year earlier.[37] A photo published later showed Song, Zhang Xueliang, Zhang Zuoxiang and Feng Yuxiang in Rehe.[38] The presence of Feng was interesting, since he had been on the outer in politics for three years. Troops from his former Guominjun were to be involved in the hostilities in later February. Tang Yulin privately sought extra funding for his troops, but Song was only able to deliver a small proportion of what Tang had requested.[39]

On his return to the south, Song stated on 22 February that the Central Government was fully prepared to resist the continued invasion of Rehe[40] and that the north Chinese troops were willing to die to guard the land. In his view the spirit of patriotism of the northerners was no less than that of the southerners, but because they lacked organisation, their strength was divided. He was now organising a Rehe Support Association (*Rehe houyuan hui*) and creating a war propaganda group at the centre. Funding had been arranged for troop payments in the north for March, April and May, with the intended issuance of 20 million dollars of National Salvation bonds already approved.[41] Song's spirit of resistance was matched by other key figures, such as Yan Xishan, governor of Shanxi, who stated on 19 February that he was willing to resist alongside Zhang Xueliang,[42] and Tang Yulin, who vowed to die guarding his country.[43]

Why was there such an open commitment to resistance by these senior Chinese political figures at this point? Several reasons can be suggested. The policy of non-resistance in 1931 had been unpopular

[36] *GWZB* 10.8 (27/2/33) *Dashi shuping,* p. 1.
[37] *GWZB* 10.8 (27/2/33) *Dashi shuping*, p. 1; Coble, *Facing* Japan, p. 92.
[38] *GWZB* 10.8 (27/2/33) after the contents page; Snow, *Far Eastern Front*, opposite p. 120 has a photo of Song, Tang and Zhang Xueliang.
[39] Coble, *Facing Japan*, p. 92.
[40] *NCH* 1/3/33, p. 323.
[41] *GWZB* 10.8 (27/2/33) *Dashi shuping*, pp. 2–3, *NCH* 1/3/33, p. 323.
[42] *GWZB* 10.8 (27/2/33) *Dashi riji* [Diary of events], p. 1.
[43] GWZB 10.8 (27/2/33) *Dashi shuping* p. 3.

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with many sectors of urban opinion,[44] so a call for resistance could be expected to win considerable public support. By taking such a firm line, senior leaders could hope to turn the attention of Jiang Jieshi from the anti-Communist campaign, which offered him considerable opportunities as the leader in charge of Bandit Suppression, but which gave them little advantage. Internationally it was clear that the formal condemnation of Japan would soon occur at the League of Nations, indicating that the occupation of the northeast was not justified in the circumstances of September 1931. Hence any further extension of the occupied area could be expected to earn even more international disapproval, especially if this extension resulted in widespread hostilities as had occurred at Shanghai in 1932. Furthermore the Rehe area could not be easily claimed by Japan as an automatic part of a state with the title of Manzhouguo: Chinese resistance would highlight the sense that this was inalienable Chinese territory.

Nevertheless there were some voices of caution about the viability of resistance in Rehe. Ding Wenjiang, a famous geologist and professor at the University of Beijing, publicly urged that there must be unity before resistance and that wild talk about recovering Manchuria should not preclude specific preparations to defend Rehe. He recognised that China lacked the industrial and economic capacity to sustain a war against a nation like Japan.[45] Such views were close to the arguments of Jiang Jieshi, who failed to visit the north in the weeks before the Rehe attack. Fu Sinian, a leading figure in Academia Sinica, remained in favour of armed resistance, in part because of his distrust of the effectiveness of the League of Nations, but he also recognised that resistance needed to be systematic and cautious.[46]

If resistance was to be meaningful, then there needed to be sufficient and credible forces to act on China's behalf. What forces were available to the Chinese? A very rough estimate can be gleaned from the fact that, when Song Ziwen issued a manifesto to all the northeastern soldiers urging them to defend China, 100,000 copies were printed. In more detail the nominally available forces may have numbered as many as 150,000, although 100,000 does seem a more realistic figure.

[44] See, for example, Donald A. Jordan, *China's Trial by Fire: The Shanghai War of 1932* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), and John Israel, *Student Nationalism in China, 1927–1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966).

[45] Fung, *In Search*, p. 83.

[46] Fung, *In Search*, p. 84.

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They included up to 40,000 from the Northeastern army under Wan Fulin, between 30,000 and 50,000 under Tang Yulin, and 30,000 in units of the former Guominjun under Sun Dianying and Song Zheyuan. In addition there were assorted village defence corps, groups of bandits driven out of Manchuria by the Japanese and five brigades of volunteers under Zhu Qinglan.[47]

This latter force illustrates some of the problems for any potential resistance effort. Zhu Qinglan, from Zhejiang, had served as a junior Qing official in Fengtian, had worked with Sun Yixian in 1917 and had returned to the Northeast in 1922 on Sun's recommendation, where he served as commander of the Chinese Eastern Railway Rail guards. By 1931 he was a member of the Control *Yuan* and had headed Nanjing government committees on the northeast. In November 1931 in Shanghai he had organised a Northeastern Refugee Aid Association. From there he moved to Beiping in 1932 and in August organised the Society for the Support of the Masses in Liaodong, Jilin and Heilongjiang (*LiaoJiHei minchong houyuan hui*). This society collected money for resistance by volunteers in the northeast. On 6 January 1933, in recognition of the threat in Rehe, the Society's name was expanded to include Rehe. The Society worked with other anti-Japanese organisations to prepare for resistance.[48] Nevertheless the volunteers recruited through the Society were so badly behaved in Rehe, that, rather than contributing to the resistance effort, they earned an order for their arrest from Zhang Xueliang.[49]

With tensions rising, it was necessary to nominate a commander-in-chief for these North China forces and this role fell to Zhang Zuoxiang. He was an experienced general who had been chairman of the Jirin provincial government and deputy commander-in-chief for North East frontier defense between 1928 and 1931.[50] This implied that the resistance to Japan would be the principal responsibility of those who were associated with Zhang Xueliang, rather than falling directly under the central government, since no senior central officer was to be involved. Some claim that Zhang Zuoxiang never left Peiping,[51] implying a total lack of commitment to resistance, but this is not true,

[47] Snow, *Far Eastern Front,* p. 249; Coble, *Facing Japan,* p. 93.
[48] *Dongbei renwu da cidian*, pp. 712–3.
[49] Coble, *Facing China*, p. 94.
[50] *Who's who in China*, 5th edn, 1936, pp. 15–16.
[51] Coble, *Facing Japan,* pp. 94–5.

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since his movements to and from the war zone were reported in the press.[52]

At a diplomatic level, Japan raised its pressure on the afternoon of 23 February 1933, when Uyemura, the Japanese Consul-General at Nanjing, handed the following statement directly to Nanjing's Foreign Minister, Luo Wen'gan:

a) the presence of troops under Zhang Xueliang and other anti-Manzhouguo forces is incompatible not only with the sovereignty of Manzhouguo but also with the restoration of peace and order in Rehe... The Manzhouguo Government has repeatedly demanded that Marshal Zhang Xueliang withdraw his troops to regions inside the Great Wall, but these demands were unheeded...
b) the activities of the Japanese troops in Rehe whose aim is the pacification of Rehe province, as stated above and who are cooperating with the Manzhouguo forces, have no other objective than to insure order and tranquillity in that province. In principle they will remain within the territory of Manzhouguo...
c) Manzhouguo has always accorded generous treatment to anti-Manzhouguo forces who surrender themselves. Should the troops of Tang Yulin or other anti-Manzhouguo forces surrender to Manzhouguo, they will be dealt with leniently in accordance with the policy hitherto followed.[53]

One should note that there was no mention of the case of Captain Ishimoto Gonshiro, an officer who was said to have disappeared on his way to negotiations with Tang Yulin in the autumn of 1932, a case which the Japanese had taken up repeatedly with Tang. Ishimoto's body was later reported to have been found in Rehe a few miles east of Chaoyang in March 1933.[54]

Luo Wen'gan's reply was direct. 'China naturally reserves the right of self-defence and if fighting spreads from Rehe to north China, all responsibility for any situation arising therefrom must be entirely with Japan.' As to the suggestion that Tang might surrender, this was an affront to Tang and the Chinese people, for 'General Tang Yulin, chairman of Rehe province, is a high provincial military authority of the Chinese Government. Being in command of the military forces in Rehe, he has the duty to defend that province. The allegation made by the Japanese Government, concerning the chairman of Rehe province,

[52] *NCH* 9/3/33, p. 367 and 369.
[53] *NCH* 1/3/33, p. 328.
[54] Snow, *Far Eastern Front,* p.346; *NCH* 22/3/33, p. 446.

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must be regarded as a deliberate affront. The Chinese government hereby lodges a protest.'[55]

Although the demands presented on 23 February had no specific timetable attached, it is clear that the campaign had already begun. Tokyo reported that Manzhouguo regulars had started to move at midnight on 22 February, while at Chaoyang, Dong Futing reported heavy fighting during the day of 23 February.

The campaign rapidly proved disastrous for the Chinese defenders of Rehe. Within less than two weeks the province had been effectively occupied by Japan. Despite the snowy conditions and the lack of good roads, the Japanese pushed forward rapidly on three fronts, in the northeast from Kailu towards Chifeng, in the centre at Chaoyang and from the southeast towards Lingyuan, making very effective use of their total air superiority to bomb and strafe at will. By 3 March, Chifeng had fallen, despite the efforts of Sun Dianying who belatedly led a claimed 30,000 troops from Feng Yuxiang's former army to reach and defend the town. Chengde, the provincial capital, fell on 4 March, with Tang Yulin having commandeered hundreds of trucks the day before to ship out his personal belongings towards the Great Wall. Japanese forces had reached to within sight of the main gates along the Rehe section of the Great Wall by 5 and 6 March.[56]

What had gone wrong for China? Foreign opinion was clearly expressed in an editorial in the *North China Herald*, which displayed both dismay at the ease of the Japanese victory and relief at money saved from fruitless military adventure. 'A real resistance could have been staged in Rehe. It required the fervour of national conviction, the welding power of a united determination, from which all personal prejudices, all selfish pecuniary anxieties had been exorcised. Above all, it demanded from the people of Rehe the belief that the administration to be defended was worth defending.'[57] It seemed to the editor that the conditions for 'real resistance' had not been met.

From the Chinese side, we have Song's statement after the campaign, a sharp contrast to his public optimism in February. 'When I returned from my visit to Rehe, I was asked by various military leaders how long in my opinion the province could be defended. I replied from a week to ten days. I was received with polite but incredulous smiles. "It will take the Japanese Army several weeks to march through Rehe

[55] *NCH* 1/3/33, p.328; Snow, *Far Eastern Front*, p. 245.
[56] *NCH* 8/3/33, pp. 367–9.
[57] *NCH* 8/3/33, p. 364.

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even if they encountered not a single shot". My answer was, "But the Japanese army is not going to march on foot." I saw an army with no staff work, with the generals staying hundreds of miles behind, with no transport except of the most primitive sort, which took several weeks for supplies to reach the front, no liaison between different commands, no anti-aircraft guns and trenching materials or artillery, and soldiers trained only in drill ground rudiments... the same defiles of Rehe which if well and scientifically defended may prove impregnable, for these conditions [of enemy planes and artillery] become virtual deathtraps... I maintain we did right in fighting in Rehe, if only to prove that Rehe is Chinese territory momentarily to be filched by a stronger enemy... The blame lies not so much with individuals, but in the system which permits the existence of vast armies of ill-fed, ill-armed and ill-trained soldiery which in times of crisis degenerate into hopeless mobs.'[58]

The collapse was dramatic, especially after the warlike speeches of Song Ziwen and of official Chinese propaganda, yet in North China it had been predicted by foreign military experts and even by the Chinese public. For several weeks there had been talk of dissensions among the Chinese generals, while the loyalty of some commanders was uncertain,[59] yet what is the evidence for defections? News reports at the time pointed to two important cases. Two brigades within Dong Futing's units near Chaoyang certainly did defect, resulting in Chinese inability to contain the central thrust of the Japanese advance,[60] but repeated rumours of the defection of Sun Dianying were clearly wrong, since Sun went on to resist the Japanese in the western parts of Rehe for some time after the collapse of the provincial capital.[61] There were also reports that some units of the Manzhouguo forces defected to the Chinese side at the start of the campaign, but even if true, the impact on Japanese effectiveness was clearly minimal.[62]

In discussing the reasons for Chinese failure it is easy to highlight the military problems, as did the journalist, Edgar Snow, who described the whole as 'one of worst débâcles in Chinese military history'. He noted that the generals had conducted the defence as if it was a surprise attack, with no effective centralised command and staff work

[58] *NCH* 8/3/33, p. 363.
[59] *NCH* 15/3/99, p. 409.
[60] *NCH* 8/3/33, p. 367, reporting Chinese sources.
[61] *NCH* 8/3/33, p. 367, 369, 15/3/33, p.402.
[62] *NCH* 8/3/33, p. 367, with reference to Yang Yingpo.

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a joke. Virtually nothing had been done to assure communications while transport facilities were pitifully inadequate, with hospital bases primitive and remote from the front. Commissariat units had lost themselves in the hills, while ordnance had supplied dud ammunition. Poorly disciplined and unpaid units had broken and fled, affecting the position of better troops.[63] Nevertheless he also noted the wider issue as no commander could be certain of the military *or political* [my emphasis] position of his fellows. Resistance required political will as well as military capability.

The events in Rehe clearly differed from those in September 1931, when non-resistance was the centre's command which had been obeyed by the vast majority of the North Eastern military. This time there was an expectation of resistance, accompanied by a powerful display of patriotic rhetoric by both local and central leaders, because Japan's claim on Rehe was perceived to be very weak and international displeasure at Japanese aggression seemed likely. Yet rhetoric alone could not substitute for the key ingredients needed for the successful implementation of resistance. The Chinese military forces were undoubtedly ill-equipped, but more importantly their leaders were unwilling to commit their forces wholeheartedly in the context of half-hearted central support. The central government for its part did not commit any troops to the battle, until after the Japanese soldiers reached the Great Wall, and Jiang Jieshi, the nation's senior military leader, only came north in March 1933, while even the proposed bonds to raise additional funds were to be financed by northern bankers. Without the authority of central coordination, the military command in Rehe was indecisive and troops were withdrawn at the instigation of local commanders, resulting in a chaotic situation in the Chengde area within a week of the Japanese attack. Those who did attempt to resist over a longer period such as Sun Dianying in central Rehe found no effective back-up from their colleagues at the provincial capital and were soon driven out by the Japanese. Tang Yulin's unduly hasty abandonment of his capital was perceived as desertion by his troops, whilst being to some extent welcomed by a civilian population that had been severely oppressed by his rule.

Despite some intense fighting during March 1933 along the Great Wall, especially at key transit points between Rehe and Hebei, such as Gubeikou, the loss of Rehe was final, with its subsequent full

[63] Snow, *Far Eastern Front,* pp. 248–9.

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incorporation into Manzhouguo, so blame for the loss had to be apportioned. Although Tang Yulin was immediately relieved of his governorship and orders given for his arrest, he remained active in military affairs in the north for another eighteen months, working initially alongside Feng Yuxiang and others in Chahaer. The central government rescinded the order for his arrest in January 1934.[64] The chief responsibility was taken up by Zhang Xueliang, who handed in his resignation to Jiang on 8 March and issued a circular telegram of apology on 11 March, subsequently going to Italy in April for eight months.[65] 'How can I ever justify in the eyes of the nation', he wrote, 'for [sic] the loss of Rehe within barely ten days.'[66] Song Ziwen also had to reorient his career more firmly back to finance. He took the opportunity provided by the World Economic Conference in April 1933 to leave China and remain overseas for several months, including negotiating an important US$50 million wheat and cotton loan from the United States in June.[67] Wang Jingwei resumed his post as head of the Executive Yuan on 30 March, with the additional temporary role of foreign minister, and authorised the negotiations in the north, which culminated in the Tanggu truce of 31 May.[68] Jiang Jieshi continued with his anti-communist tasks in the south and within months formally began the fifth encirclement campaign.

In conclusion one may ask why the central government chose to allow Rehe to fall with so little effective support. In discussing the difference between resistance and non-resistance, one of the Tianjin newspapers before the campaign noted that what was needed was not just the determination to resist but plans for resistance, plans which were currently lacking.[69] China lacked those plans on a national scale because none of China's leaders at the centre saw resistance at that time as the most effective way to advance either their own careers or the fortunes of their faction. In particular the limited scope of the Guomindang penetration of North and Northeast China before 1931 meant that the loss of territory in this area was not perceived as immediately weakening for the Party, even if it harmed

[64] *Dongbei renwu da cidian,* p. 734; Shen, *Dongbei Ya yanjiu*, p. 138.
[65] *Zhang Xueliang yanjiu*, vol.1, p. 227.
[66] *NCH*, 15.3.33, p. 403.
[67] Boorman, *Biographical*, vol. 3, p. 151; James C. Thomson, *While China Faced West: American Reformers in Nationalist China, 1928–37* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), pp. 27, 59.
[68] Boorman, *Biographical*, vol.3, p. 373; *Wei Manzhouguo*, pp. 33–5.
[69] *GWZB* 10.2 (9/1/33), *Luping xuanji*, pp. 7–8, citing the *Tianjin Yishibao*.

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China. More particularly the military humbling of Zhang Xueliang and his subordinates could play a role in enhancing the political and military power of the centre relative to all its Chinese regional rivals, although it provided no immediate improvement in China's capacity to deal with the military threat of Japan. As the North China Herald noted, 'history will show that it [the Rehe campaign] was connected with questions of domestic politics rather than with any more serious purpose.'[70] It would require several further years of Japanese aggression and the gradual emergence of a fuller sense of national emergency before the leaders of the Guomindang would commit themselves to a wholehearted resistance which could embrace militarists, communists and the party's own rank and file.

[70] *NCH* 15/3/33, p. 409.

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